

MEMORANDUM FOR: C&IEG

Hank:

We were hopeful of getting a consolidated WPIC statement on AEGU, but [] frankly admits that the attached paper represents his opinion only. I believe [] led a delegation of six IEG's to this presentation. I would very much like to have the ISG position if possible. ~~it~~ does differ from []

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13 March 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director, NPIC

SUBJECT: Briefing on CRS "AEGIS" Subject Search System

1. In reporting on the CRS public relations effort in support of their AEGIS effort I must make clear at the start that this is not a consolidation of the reactions of the NPIC personnel present at the briefing. This is my own analysis and is, I am certain, at variance with the reactions of many of the NPIC personnel present at the briefing.

2. The AEGIS presentation was in two parts. One part was an exposition of the AEGIS subject search system itself. The other part was a quite unrelated demonstration of the Rapid Search Machine (RSM). The AEGIS system has replaced the several diverse indexing systems (Intellifax, Special Register, etc.) formerly operated on a functionally-structured basis by CRS with a single "shallow" indexing system that is operated by areally-structured indexers and retrieval specialists. This approach recognizes that most of the great volume of documents indexed by CRS will never be recalled. Thus the way to minimize the overall system cost is to reduce the effort spent on indexing the input documents, and concentrate instead on the formulation of strategies for searching the indices to answer requests against CRS and also on reviewing the citations produced by such searches in an attempt to eliminate irrelevant citations from the responses furnished by CRS to its customers. The system is working quite well, according to individuals from Director down to Division Chief level in CRS and also according to our "independent" consultant (whose report CRS is distributing to all who pause long enough to have one thrust in their hands). I suppose that I must mention, en passant, that the indices are searched on an IBM 360/50. I will also categorically assert that the information in the preceding sentence has no significance in any assessment of the impact (real, potential, or imagined) of the AEGIS system on this Center. What is of importance to the Center are the answers to the following questions:

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(1) Can the information services now available through Central Reference Services be efficiently used to provide more support to the NPIC image interpretation process than is presently the case?

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(2) Is there any lesson to be learned by this Center from the CRS experience with shallow indexing?

I submit that the first of these questions can only be answered by the Center's photo interpreters and the various individuals, of whatever title, who channel "collateral" information to the photo interpreters. If the answer to the question is "yes" the action to achieve such increased support must be undertaken by those who serve as suppliers of information to the P.I.'s.

3. The second question posed above is one that centers around the cost-effectiveness of the exhaustive indexing that has been done in the past for documents committed to the Minicard system and which will apparently be carried forward with only slight modification and extension for the EPDF. It must be recognized that as soon as one starts searching for information contained in documents (or their micro-images) by examining surrogates rather than by reading through the total set of documents, one is going to have a certain number of misses. In CRS' experience the reduction in number of misses that would result from in-depth indexing as compared to their shallow indexing approach would not be worth the cost. Obviously our reference services are a rather different kettle of fish than the CRS operation and it may well be that the question can be answered with a categorical "NO!" But as one observing from the sidelines I am not able to make that assertion.

4. The RSM pitch was presented (and received) in a vein of "Gee Whiz, isn't this wonderful" with all the discussion centering around the machine and being couched in anthropomorphic terms. The real question is, of course, whether or not the ability to search for occurrences of words (I am well aware that complex Boolean search functions are possible) in a corpus of text is sufficient (or perhaps even more than sufficient) to obviate the need for indexing the documents or sub-elements of that corpus. It is easy to generate interesting and amusing examples of how one can find all sorts of items from a file of running text but these examples shed little light on the basic question. Only when given an answer to that question is it appropriate to start evaluating the cost-effectiveness of the various ways such a capability might be achieved. The RSM is but one of these ways and I would think it most unwise for this Center to jump in this direction simply from an assumption of effectiveness for the method.

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Chief, Technical Planning Staff, AID/PSG

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